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SUBJECT: THAILAND'S RESPONSE TO GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

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¶1. Summary: Thailand is vulnerable to the risks posed by global climate change and is taking initial steps to respond to those risks. The Royal Thai Government (RTG) participates in international fora on climate change and is signatory to several international agreements, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol. In addition to these commitments, Thailand has drafted national and local strategies to reduce its green house gas (GHG) emissions and mitigate the potential effects of rising sea levels. While the national strategy is still on the bureaucratic back burner, the Bangkok provincial government is moving forward with its own strategy, taking the lead in Thailand's response to global climate change. End summary.

Potential Impacts of Climate Change in Thailand

¶2. In 2006, the Southeast Asian System for Research Analysis (SEA START), a regional think tank dedicated to climate research, produced a technical report that used several simulations to determine the impacts of an increase in temperature of 1-2 degrees Celsius in Thailand. The results predict that the hot season would last longer and the cool season would be shorter. According to the report, the duration of the rainy season would remain the same, but the total amount of precipitation would increase.

¶3. Any increase in rainfall would further exacerbate Thailand's seasonal flooding problem. According to the Department of Disaster Mitigation and Prevention, Thailand's most frequent natural disaster is flooding with an average of 60 of its 76 provinces affected every year. Seasonal flooding has caused 135 deaths and 5.5 billion baht (USD 166 million) in property damage on average during the years 2000-2004 (the most recent years for which this data is available). Ironically, a separate agricultural simulation by SEA START predicted that the increased precipitation resulting from climate change would lead to a significant increase, three to six percent, in Thai rice production.

Disaster Mitigation and Response

14. According to Dr. Louis Lebel of the Unit for Social and Environmental Research (USER) at Chiang Mai University, Thailand, and Bangkok in particular, is under threat from rising sea levels. Dr. Lebel notes the importance of conducting disaster response exercises in order to respond effectively to natural disasters, such as flooding. Bangkok is only 40 centimeters above sea level, and sizeable communities live along the banks of the Chao Phraya River that runs through the city. The Bangkok Post reported that 55 percent of Bangkok will be underwater if mean sea level rises by 50 centimeters and 72 percent if it rises 100 centimeters.

15. At a meeting with Ambassador Boyce on July 12, Bangkok Governor Apirak Kosayothin acknowledged that communities along the Chao Phraya River would be vulnerable to flooding from a rise in sea level and requested points of contact in the U.S. with expertise in 'flood-proofing' cities, such as through the construction of a series of dikes and levees. The Regional Environmental Officer based in Embassy Bangkok has already coordinated with the OES Bureau and USAID to identify appropriate individuals in response to the Governor's request.

National Strategy to Respond to Climate Change

16. Under Thailand's Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, the Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (ONEP) is developing a new draft strategy to respond to climate change, titled "Thailand's Five-Year Strategies on Climate Change, 2008-2012". The draft lists six broad strategies, the key elements of which are the following:

- Reduce the vulnerability of Thailand to the impacts of climate change by identifying 'hotspot' areas that are especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change and by establishing early warning systems and evacuation plans for natural disasters such as

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flooding.

- Reduce GHG emissions by improving energy efficiency in transportation, industry and commercial and residential buildings and by increasing green space in cities.
- Support research and development about the impacts of climate change in Thailand.
- Raise public awareness of climate change.
- Build the capacity of scientists, engineers, technicians, public officials and others involved with climate change issues through training programs and the establishment of a national climate change information center.
- Support international cooperation on issues of climate change, especially cooperation among ASEAN countries.

17. ONEP's national plan still has several bureaucratic hurdles to clear before it becomes operational. The draft plan is still being written and is expected to be completed in August. Once the draft is finished, a working committee consisting of representatives from relevant ministries will use the strategy to develop a national action plan. The newly-formed National Climate Change Committee will then review the action plan and after it completes its revisions, will pass the strategy and action plan to the full Cabinet for final review and approval. An ONEP official told the Embassy's Regional Environmental Office that she expects the entire process to be completed by September.

Bangkok Takes the Lead

18. Bangkok is home to just over 10% of Thailand's population of 65 million, but is estimated to produce up to 40 percent of Thailand's total carbon dioxide emissions, which was 181,310 metric tons in 2000. The two largest producers of CO2 emissions are the energy production sector and the transportation sector, which produced 38% and 33% of Thailand's total CO2 emissions in 1999. Any program to reduce Thailand's greenhouse gas emissions will require Bangkok to play a leading role.

¶9. Fortunately, Governor Apirak has traditionally championed environmental issues, and his recent campaign to confront global warming has become the flagship issue for his last year in office. Under his leadership, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) is moving forward with an array of projects aimed at reducing GHG emissions. The BMA has issued a five-year plan outlining several projects to reduce Bangkok's GHG emissions by 15 percent by 2012. The plan is currently undergoing a mandatory 60-day period of public hearings prior to implementation. The hearings are expected to be completed by August 12.

¶10. In the meeting with Ambassador Boyce, Governor Apirak described the BMA strategy for reducing GHG emissions as a multi-faceted approach that includes, but is not limited to, promoting sustainable building, reducing energy consumption, improving waste removal and recycling, switching to cleaner burning fuel, reducing vehicle emissions, and conducting public awareness campaigns.

¶11. Sustainable Building: While at the Large Cities Climate Summit in New York from May 14-17, 2007, Governor Apirak committed Bangkok to the list of cities willing to retro-fit existing buildings with technology that will help reduce energy consumption. In addition to retro-fitting existing buildings, Apirak is encouraging architects and planners to develop sustainable building models, which for example, would include more windows to let in natural light and improved insulation to reduce the loss of cool air.

¶12. Reducing Energy Consumption: At his meeting with Ambassador Boyce, Governor Apirak discussed his campaign to promote the use of energy-saving compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) by city businesses and residents. Ambassador Boyce noted that USAID's Environmental Cooperation-Asia Clean Development and Climate Program (ECO-Asia CDCP), in partnership with private companies such as Philips Lighting and OSRAM, recently launched a regional initiative to certify the quality of compact fluorescent lights sold in markets in Asia. The Governor was receptive to the Ambassador's suggestion that the BMA and ECO-Asia CDCP could work together to both promote

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the use and ensure the quality of CFLs in the region.

¶13. Recycling and Cleaner Burning Fuel: The BMA, in conjunction with Bang Chak Petroleum, a private Thai company, has instituted a program in Bangkok's Pra Khanong District to buy used cooking oil from households to make biofuel. In addition to producing cleaner burning fuel, this program recycles waste that would otherwise be dumped into the city's drains and sewers, clogging them, and reducing their ability to drain surface runoff of seasonal rainwater and prevent flooding in the city.

¶14. Reducing Vehicle Emissions: In order to reduce GHG emissions from vehicles, the BMA plans to enhance public transportation through the extension of the subway and elevated train lines, introduction of a rapid bus system powered by natural gas, and the levying of congestion charges for traffic within certain districts in Bangkok. Governor Apirak, however, stressed the impossibility of imposing congestion charges until the public transportation system is improved and expanded.

¶15. Public Awareness: The BMA has initiated monthly energy conservation awareness campaigns each with a different theme. At 7:00 p.m. on May 9, the BMA turned off the lights in city administered buildings and encouraged businesses and residents to turn off their lights for 15 minutes, to demonstrate that small deeds by many people can conserve significant amounts of energy. In June, the BMA distributed 44,000 compact fluorescent bulbs to vendors at 200 wet markets located in the city as a gesture to encourage businesses and residents to use energy efficient fluorescent lighting. The theme for July is to be aware of emissions from idling cars.

Cooperation with International Organizations

¶16. Following the New York Summit, Governor Apirak met with World

Bank (WB) officials in New York and Bangkok to confirm the WB's support for the BMA's efforts in urban planning, including mass transit. They also discussed environmental stewardship, including developing and promoting renewable energy, recycling solid wastes, and reducing water and air pollution.

¶17. Governor Apirak also met with the UN Environmental Program's (UNEP) Regional Office in Bangkok to discuss the retrofitting project and his plans to reduce Bangkok's GHG emissions. UNEP pledged support for BMA's plan to publish and distribute public awareness tips on how citizens can personally help to reduce GHG emissions.

Comment

¶18. Nationally, ONEP is advancing its strategy to respond to climate change, but the projected date of September for the plan to become operational is probably unrealistic. The municipal leadership in Bangkok, however is moving forward without waiting for the national bureaucracy. It has already begun acting on its plan to reduce GHG emissions, and it is looking ahead to seek ways to mitigate the impact of future rising sea levels. Embassy's Regional Environmental Office is following up with the BMA as well as with ONEP to assist Thailand in its response to global climate change.

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